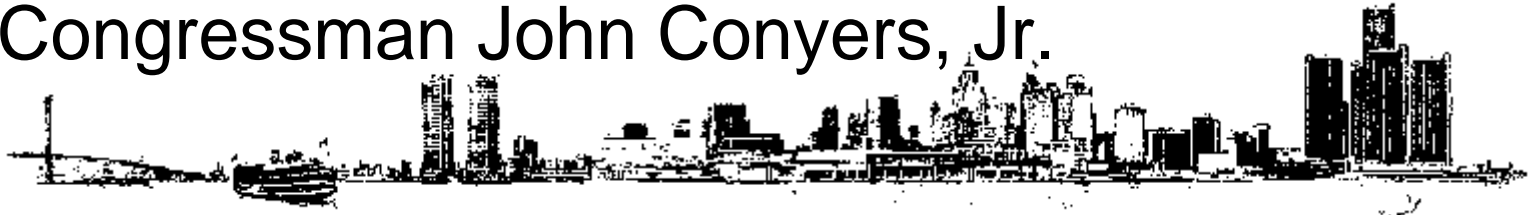


Congressman John Conyers, Jr.



Ranking Member, House Judiciary Committee

Dean of the Congressional Black Caucus

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Conyers Demands that Ashcroft Release Jacqueline Jackson from Solitary Confinement

Washington, D.C. – Rep. John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI), Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee, today spoke with Attorney General John Ashcroft and demanded that the Justice Department immediately release Jacqueline Jackson, the wife of the Reverend Jesse Jackson, from solitary prison confinement. Ms. Jackson is awaiting trial on charges of trespass at the Vieques, Puerto Rico Navy property.

Rep. Conyers issued the following statement after his telephone call with the Attorney General:

“The Department is totally off the mark on both the facts and the law in their treatment of Ms. Jackson. They claim their regulations mandate that any one who refuses to subject themselves to the humiliation of a full strip and body cavity search must be thrown in solitary confinement for the good of the prison population. But their own regulations clearly state that staff may conduct a visual search where there is a reasonable belief that contraband may be concealed on the person.” Clearly, Ms. Jackson is not carrying drugs, weapons or other forms of contraband, and the body cavity search is nothing less than physical intimidation that would have made Bull Connor blush.

“The Department’s action also appears to blatantly violate Ms. Jackson’s constitutional rights. Just four months ago, the First Circuit Court of Appeals, in Roberts v. Rhode Island, 239 F.3d 107 (1st Cir., 2001), held that indiscriminate strip searches are unconstitutional where the corrections officers did not have any reasonable suspicion that the individual inmate was concealing contraband. In a unanimous opinion by Judge Torruella, the court wrote “an administrative strip search policy routinely applied [in federal prison admittance] ... can not be justified simply on the basis of administrative ease in attending to security considerations.” Neither the Department of Justice nor Attorney General Ashcroft has provided me with a single reason why their actions are not inconsistent with the case, which constitutes the law of the land in Puerto Rico.

“Finally, I continue to be miffed as to why the Department has refused to release Ms. Jackson on her own recognizance pending her trial. I explained to the Attorney General that the Bail Reform Act (18 USC 3142) clearly provides that the defendant must be released on personal recognizance unless such release “will not reasonably assure the appearance of the person as required or will endanger the safety of any other person in the community.” I informed Mr. Ashcroft that I was able to personally vouch for Ms. Jackson, a person of the highest integrity. But he apparently believes this long standing national figure to be simply too great of a threat to flee or a threat to endanger another person’s safety.

“I call on the Attorney General to stop hiding behind the mistakes and misjudgments made by low level bureaucrats in his employ, and take full responsibility for the actions of the U.S. Attorneys office in Puerto Rico. Only then will we be in a position to obtain justice in this matter.

“If a person of Ms. Jackson’s stature and reputation can be so cavalierly mistreated and abused by our federal government, I’m concerned that ordinary citizens are facing even more abusive treatment. Whatever the resolution of Ms. Jackson’s case, this may well necessitate hearings to shed further light on the problem of abusive treatment of persons charged with minor misdemeanor offenses.”

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